



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### Reformed Protestantism and the origins of modern environmentalism

**Citation for published version:**

Northcott, M 2018, 'Reformed Protestantism and the origins of modern environmentalism', *Philosophia Reformata*, vol. 83, no. 1, pp. 19-33. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23528230-08301003>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1163/23528230-08301003](https://doi.org/10.1163/23528230-08301003)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

Philosophia Reformata

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# Reformed Protestantism and the Origins of Modern Environmentalism

*Michael S Northcott*

School of Divinity, University of Edinburgh

[m.northcott@ed.ac.uk](mailto:m.northcott@ed.ac.uk)

## Abstract

The question I investigate in this essay is why it was individuals and regions with a Reformed Protestant religious background - rather than say Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Buddhist or Taoist - which pioneered environmental campaigns and efforts to set aside national parks and rare species for conservation. Subsidiary questions discussed are two: 1. What might be the roots of an affinity between Protestantism and an ecological orientation to the world? 2. If there was this affinity in the nineteenth century origins of ecological conservation, why is it not more widely acknowledged in contemporary scholarship and in the public mind?

## Keywords

Protestantism, Romanticism, origins of environmentalism, nature conservation.

## 1 Introduction

Since the publication of Lynn White Jr's essay on the historic roots of the ecological crisis, Christianity, including Protestant Christianity, has been subjected to what James Nash called an 'ecological complaint' (White 1967, Nash 1991). In essence this complaint is that, as compared to cultures embracing animist or pantheist cosmologies, the Christian doctrine of creation disenchantments the natural world since it sets God as Creator apart from the world and so renders the world, and creatures in it, available to domination and instrumental use by humans. White argued that this ontological absence of God from the Christian, and more especially the *Latin* Christian, worldview made possible the development of the modern scientific perspective in which nature is treated as mechanism ordered by predictable laws, and the development of technologies such as the plough and the steam engine which facilitate the instrumental subduing of nonhumans and the environment to human uses. White's essay was novel in that he was the first to argue that religion played a central role in the origin of the environmental crisis, and second he was the first to argue that religion may play a role in the resolution of the environmental crisis: in particular, White suggested that Franciscan attitudes to nature, and those of Zen Buddhism, might play a role in mitigating the disenchantment of nature promoted by other forms of Latin Christianity (White 1967).

The first theologian to respond to White's essay was the Reformed Protestant founder of the Swiss-based L'Abri community, Francis Schaeffer (1970). Schaeffer accepted White's argument that the 'base' of a person's thoughts - their core beliefs about God, humanity, nature, and their inter-relations - shape a person's actions towards the environment. And he argued that the base for honouring creation in Christianity was the recognition that the earth is God's creation. But this recognition should not mean a lack of respect: Schaeffer pointed out that biblical prophecy and apocalyptic indicate that the future shape of a redeemed earth will be analogous to the present physical order, and hence that there is going to be a 'total redemption in the future' which includes the earth and all living beings (Schaeffer 1968a). Since the redemptive form of the earth in biblical prophecy and apocalyptic bears resemblance to its current physical characteristics, Christians ought to care for creation in its current condition and defend it from destruction and pollution.

Where Schaeffer differed from White was when he argued that pollution, and other signs of ecological neglect and destruction, are not so much signs of the influence of Christian teaching as they are indicative of the collapse of belief in an objective 'God who is there': pre-Enlightenment Christianity, Schaeffer argued, was founded on belief in a creator God whose being and acts underwrite the objective moral and physical order of creation. This belief also underwrote epistemological trust in the correspondence between human perceptions of the natural world and the order of nature. For Schaeffer the doctrine of creation and Christian epistemology were undermined by the Enlightenment (Schaeffer 1968b), though it must be said that Copernicanism also played a crucial role (Northcott 2013). Schaeffer was highly critical of the Enlightenment split between scientific and philosophical ways of knowing and experiencing reality, and argued it had contributed to the deep relativism and subjectivism of contemporary culture: the result was nihilism and spiritual poverty, and this had led to an alienation between people and nature: the resultant '(D)eath of joy in nature is leading to the death of nature itself' (Schaeffer 1970, 10). This is a surprisingly romantic-sounding thought for a theologian who came close to biblical literalism in his creationist dismissal of the scientific account of evolution, and who was critical of the experiential turn of popular culture under the influence of existentialism in the 1960s (Schaeffer 1972). But Schaeffer did choose to set up his intellectual, artistic, and therapeutic community from the cultural storm of the 1960s in the Alps of Switzerland. He was also an old fashioned Platonist: he thought that natural beauty mattered, since beauty is the physical manifestation of the mind of the maker in creation, as Jean Calvin had also taught, and like the romantics Schaeffer admired the natural beauty of mountainous landscapes, such as the Swiss Alps where he made his home.

The first modern protests at the desecration of nature from industrial development and pollution – including reservoirs, trains, atmospheric pollution and the killing of wild animals

and birds – originated among English romantics, including Coleridge, Wordsworth and Ruskin, and in the United States, Edward Thoreau and John Muir. Wordsworth, Ruskin and Carlyle were all founder members of the Thirlmere Defence Association which was the first environmental protest campaign in history, and was formed to resist the City of Manchester Corporation raising the level of Thirlmere Lake with a dam and pumping the water to Manchester (Ritvo 2009). Usually considered first and foremost Romantics, rather than Protestants, there is a significant, though under-investigated, reformed and protestant genealogy to the ideas and experiences which led to the romantic movement in Northern Europe. By extension there is a lack of scholarly investigation of Protestantism's role in generating ideas about the spiritual quality of sublime landscapes, and of human encounters with them, and the role these played in the first efforts to protect these landscapes from industrial developments such as reservoirs and railways. These efforts led in the late nineteenth century to the founding of environmental movements to protect open space, and especially mountainous and forested landscapes, birds and wild creatures, first in England and California, and subsequently throughout much of North America and Northern Europe. It is arguable that a secular and societal bias in environmental historians, and historians more generally, has led to a neglect of the striking fact that it was individuals and regions with a Reformed Protestant religious background - rather than say Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Buddhist or Taoist - which pioneered environmental campaigns and efforts to set aside national parks and rare species for conservation.

For contemporary evidence that this affinity is empirically still discernible, a 1993 cross-national survey of environmental attitudes provides good data. Dunlap, Gallup et al show that concern about animal welfare, biodiversity and climate change, and environmental regulations, are strongest in formerly majority-Protestant nations and regions of the world (Dunlap, Gallup et al 1993). Thomas R. Dunlap explains this affinity by noting the religious tenor to environmentalism which he argues is Protestant in origin: this is indicated in the belief that there is redemptive power for humans in untrammelled nature and wilderness (Dunlap T. R. 2004), a belief that may be found earlier in Christian culture in the Gospel narratives of the sojourns of Christ in desert places for prayer and spiritual solace, and the subsequent history of the Desert Fathers (Bratton 1993). That nature in its original ordering has the power to counter-balance human disorder, that wilderness enables humans to repair their innate sense of wrongness by a 'proper connection with the higher powers' (James 1902, 498), is because wilderness is the least humanly influenced of landscapes, and therefore the most redolent of the activities of the Creator and, as Calvin acknowledged, the least marred by sin and the 'Fall' (Calvin, .

In this paper I outline five features of Protestant culture which help to explain the historic association, noted not only by Dunlap, but also in recent studies by Stoll (1997), Lane (2011)

and Berry (2015), between Protestant cultures and the origins of environmentalism, and they are: 1. the Protestant recovery of the religious power of biblical literature and the influence of biblical nature imagery and poetry as source for romantic and modern appreciation of nature as expressed in literature, and in activities such as hiking, mountaineering and bird watching; 2. Protestant pietism which emphasised the importance of individual spiritual experience of the divine over ritual participation in community- or priest-mediated events for the salvation of the individual; 3. the doctrine of the Fall and original sin in which the 'mark of Cain' is identified with humanity and human influence, while creation is considered still a 'theatre of God's glory' and hence a potential site for spiritual restoration; 4. Protestant suspicion of hierarchy, resistance to tyranny, and promotion of democratic government by meetings of citizens rather than by landowners, monarchs, or priests; 5. Protestant advocacy of laws promulgated by the State as secular counterpart to the spiritual laws and governance of the Church, and as protection of citizens from tyranny.

## **2. The Religious Power of Biblical Literature**

*Sola scriptura* was a central slogan of the Reformation era and the Reformation created a new cultural attention to biblical literature which was also advanced by new vernacular translations. The Reformation therefore gave new cultural power and authority to the bible in popular and political imagination, and in literary and scientific circles: vernacular bibles, such as the *Luther Bible* and William Tyndale's English translation, also played a significant role in the development of the early modern literary imaginary, including especially romanticism, and a related new appreciation of nature, and especially wild and mountainous nature.

The origins of the new appreciation of mountains, waterfalls and hilly landscapes, which is the germ of the other features of early environmentalism, are connected with the Romantic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The cultural movement known as Romanticism had its origins among English, French and German artists, poets, philosophers and theologians and was in part a reaction to the Enlightenment 'age of reason'. Romantics such as Rousseau, Goethe, Schelling, Hegel, and Wordsworth sought to rebalance a strong emphasis on 'objective' rational knowing and the scientific method with an emphasis on subjective knowing and emotional and spiritual experience. At the same time Romanticism - as the word indicates - was an appeal to measure the present against the past - i.e. the *roman*. This appeal was given all the more weight in the context of the other cultural upheavals of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including the rise of modern science and scientific agriculture and forestry, and the related forced migration of many Europeans from traditional peasant farms and villages into urban slums and industrial, factory-based work. The romantic emphasis on the individual, and on encounters with the sublime in nature, were powerful

counterweights to the corralling of the masses into crowded and smoke-shrouded cities. There were also strong affinities between the Romantic emphasis on individual experience and nature piety and prior Protestant and Reformed emphases on the importance of individual experience and personal piety in the religious journey of the soul. Perhaps the most influential theologian who mediated this emphasis between Christian Reformed theology and romanticism was Friedrich Schleiermacher for whom the 'feeling of absolute dependence' on the divine Spirit was the hermeneutical fulcrum of theology (Schleiermacher, 1928). However the religious influences on the Romantic movement, and by extension the role of religion in the origins of the new natural sublime, and the rise of environmental protests against the instrumental subjugation of nature, have been down-played by historians.

In an influential account, Marjorie Nicolson calls the new eighteenth century sensibility of mountains as places of beauty and splendour the 'aesthetic of the infinite' (Nicolson 1959). She argued that it represented the 'transfer of vastness from God to interstellar space, then to terrestrial mountains', and that this transfer may first be found in early modern literature, and especially in descriptions of the sky, the stars, and high mountain vistas in John Milton's sixteenth century writings on paradise. Milton had walked in the Alps, and in both *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671) he wrote lyrically about the natural vastness of the cosmos, of high mountain vistas and landscapes. The influence is traceable from these passages in Milton to early pioneers of the new aesthetics of nature, mountains and landscape, and from them to modern conservation efforts. Coleridge, who was a close friend of Wordsworth and who, with Ruskin, Carlisle and others belonged to a number of associations established to defend the Lake District from development, writes that he intends to follow Milton in writing prose and poems about his walks with his romantic friends in the lakes and mountains of Northern England (1991, 57). Analogously, *Paradise Lost* was one of only four books that John Muir regularly took with him on his walks in the Californian Sierra.

The new romantic appreciation for mountains as places of moral and spiritual power, as well as testing grounds of physical endurance, may be traced not only to Milton but also to the lectures of Robert Lowth, Professor of Poetry at Oxford University in the eighteenth century, on Hebrew poetry. Lowth made crucial innovations in the study and interpretation of Hebrew poetry, and his lectures significantly influenced the Romantic poets and writers who first advanced the cause of nature conservation in England, including Coleridge and Wordsworth. Lowth's lectures were also translated into German and were read by the German romantics, including Herder and Holderlin. In his lectures, and his textual representations of Hebrew poetry, Lowth uncovered and explained the symbolic power of poetic parallelism which had been lost in translation for many centuries (Lowth 1829). Lowth identified in the flexible and yet rhythmic ebb and flow of Hebrew parallelism a linguistic style more free flowing, and

more direct and engaged with the emotions of the writer, and hence the reader, than that of classical poetry, and in so doing argued for the greater sublimity - a word he uses hundreds of times in his lectures - of Hebrew compared to more formalistic classical styles of poetry: and his advocacy of the Hebrew style as sublime encouraged the emergence of a new free flowing style of English poetry among his students. Lowth also sought to show in his exegesis and literary critical remarks on Hebrew texts that the openness of Hebrew poetry to the passionate expression of feeling, and especially towards natural beauty and divine power, was driven by a sense of the immanence of the divine Creator in the grandeur of the natural world, and the resonance between the soul of the poet and the glorious marks of the maker in Creation.

The association that Lowth identified in Hebrew poetry between the Hebrew awareness of the divine Spirit in nature and the emotions and spirit of the poet deeply influenced the romantic poets in their new identification of moral and spiritual values in nature - and more especially in rocky crags, mountains, waterfalls, upland forests, and mountain vistas.<sup>1</sup> The animistic strain in Hebrew poetry was recovered by Lowth in such a way that it inspired the romantics of the eighteenth century themselves to recover a sense of divine presence in the temple of creation, - especially the high mountain, in the 'vernal wood' and in the living creatures that inhabit them. As Prickett puts it, Lowth's lectures not only 'transformed biblical studies in England and Germany' but they 'do more than any other single work to make the Biblical tradition, rather than the neo-classical one, the central poetic tradition of the Romantics' (Prickett 1996, 105).

### **3. The Protestant Self and Nature Spirituality**

A second reason I suggest that Protestantism proved 'friendly' to environmentalism, and the new aesthetic of nature as sublime, is the changing nature of religious experience, and the rise of attention to the emotions in the evolving conception of the individual 'self' in Protestant culture (Taylor, 1989). Protestantism, shifted the soteriological focus of Christianity from the mediatory actions of priests in the Mass and the other sacraments, and good works such as almsgiving, to a range of loci, both internal and external, including personal bible reading and devotion, discipline in daily life, and what Weber called the 'work ethic'. The work ethic was linked to the rejection of the idea of a special vocation for monks and religious which meant a lower and more lax standard of life and devotion for lay people (Weber 1930). This led to new emphases on personal experience, on feelings, and on reason, as constitutive components of the Protestants self, and of the ways towards the moral and spiritual formation of the self. As Charles Taylor argues, these tendencies in Protestantism underwrote the emergence of the

---

<sup>1</sup> My attention was first drawn to the significance of Lowth's new translations and literary interpretations of Hebrew poetry for the origination of romantic sensibilities towards nature by Strachan (2008): another key secondary work on this is Prickett (1996).

new cultural emphasis on the moral and spiritual significance of ‘everyday life’ as foundational ‘source of the self’ in modernity (Taylor 1989, 185-6). This led in turn to new conceptions of recreation, including walking and hiking, as ways to form, and redeem, the self. It is this Protestant background which provides the cultural roots of the eighteenth century turn toward nature of the romantics in England and Germany, including Coleridge, Holderlin, Ruskin, Shelley and Wordsworth, who began to look to nature as redemptive source of moral and spiritual guidance (Abrams 1971). The theological key to understanding this sourcing of the recreation of the self in nature is that for the late medieval theologians, and for the Reformers, nature was the ‘original book of God’s works’ (Berry, R. J., . As the *original* book, nature was relatively unsullied compared to humanity after the Fall, and ‘original sin’ whose effects on humans the Reformers magnified in contrast to their medieval forbears.

#### **4 The Redeeming Power of Nature and the Environmental Fall**

The turn of Protestant’s to nature as a source of the ‘re-creation’ of the self is ultimately soteriological in origin (Lane 2011, Berry 2015). The Reformers, amplifying Augustine, elaborated a fuller account of the nature of evil and its origins in the original fall from grace of Adam and Eve, and the consequent exile from the Garden of Eden. Humanity for John Calvin was ‘absolutely depraved’ and human reason, and even the soul, were far more marred by sin than they were said to have been by early Christian theologians, by the Greek Fathers, and by Orthodox theologians to this day.<sup>2</sup> For Calvin, while humanity and her works are corrupted by sin and the fall, nature remains the relatively unsullied ‘theatre of God’s works’ where the original beneficence of the divine Creator may still be discerned in the beauty, diversity, fecundity and awesome power of the natural world.<sup>3</sup>

Protestantism therefore provided the root for a strong cultural turn in Protestant cultural to ‘get back to the garden’ since it was in Eden - that unsullied landscape of biblical myth - that humans had last known redemption apart from Christ. The subsequent cultural turn to the individual, and to faith and reason as the sources of the individual's redemption, ultimately led to a separation between confessional and revealed conceptions of salvation and Romantic conceptions of moral and spiritual transcendence. By so emphasising the fallenness of humans, the Reformers unwittingly provided the seedbed for a new cultural turn toward nature in succeeding centuries in early modernity, and for the emergence in Protestant nations

---

<sup>2</sup> For historical genealogies of the doctrine of original sin, and contrasts between early Christian, Orthodox, Catholic, and Reformed views, see Wiley (2002) and Williams, Patricia (2001) *Doing Without Adam and Eve: Sociobiology and Original Sin*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, John (2009) *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Eng. trans. McKee, A L, Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, Book 1: 5.



including Britain, Germany and the United States, of what Catherine Albanese has called ‘nature religion’ which is increasingly post-Christian in its formulation and practices. Hence paradoxically, the third reason why majority or formerly majority Protestant nations tend to be favourable to environmentalism is the Reformers’ doctrines of sin and the fall, and their correlative accounts of nature as a relatively unsullied realm where divinely created order, even in a postlapsarian world, is still evident and revealed. We are in other words dealing here with what Gregory has insightfully called the ‘unintended Reformation’ (Gregory 2012), and hence the unforeseen consequences of the Reformation, including a cultural separation between ecclesial conceptions of redemption and post-Christian or ‘secular’ conceptions focused on such practices as nature walking and ecological conservation.

It was this deep soteriological contrast between human achievements and divine works that provided the root of the new Protestant aesthetic of beauty, nowhere more powerfully exemplified than in Jonathan Edwards account of divine beauty in nature.<sup>4</sup> For Edwards, the natural world was a ‘school of desire’ more powerful in its redemptive potential than the mediatory power of ecclesiastical rituals (Lane 2004). And this Protestant turn to the revelation of beauty in natural order was the fount of the Romantic movement and the distinctive eighteenth century ‘discovery’ of the sublime, in which mountain heights, landscape vistas, and rocky outcrops were said to be natural places where individuals could experience feelings of awe and ecstasy which were potentially transformative (Nicholson 1959). The Protestant ‘discovery’ of nature as sublime, and as a new source of moral and spiritual sustenance, as well as the means through which people meet their material needs and aspirations, is a powerful source of the philosophical claim that there reside in particular ‘wild’ or unsullied places, and species, intrinsic values which ought not to be set aside in an economic or utilitarian calculus which permits their destruction in the pursuit of human material comfort, or technological and economic progress. The concept of intrinsic value in nature passed into law, first in the United States’ *Endangered Species Act* in 1973, and is now found in environmental regulations in many other legal jurisdictions, including New Zealand and Ecuador, and in the environmental laws and regulations of the European Union.<sup>5</sup>

## **5 Reformation Democracy and the Political Character of Environmental Protest**

Protestantism’s suspicion of hierarchy, and its promotion of a democratic culture, is a fourth reason why Protestant nations are the first in modern history to see the emergence of environmental *campaigns*. In democracies, when the rich and powerful, including landowners

---

<sup>4</sup> For a short essay on Edwards’ view of beauty see Edwards, Jonathan (1842).

<sup>5</sup> Among the earliest advocates of the idea of the intrinsic value of *nature* - until the mid-twentieth century intrinsic value had been identified, after Immanuel Kant, with persons exclusively - were the Protestant theologians John B. Cobb and David R. Griffin in Cobb and Griffin (1976).

and public corporations, pollute or adulterate the land, water, food or air of ordinary citizens, citizens are able to get together, protest about this, and start civil society and work-place campaigns to change it. The first environmental campaigns to protect nature from industrial development concerned reservoirs created by city corporations to capture piped water. Thomas Carlyle, Hardwick Rawnsley, John Ruskin and William Wordsworth all campaigned to try to prevent the Corporation of Manchester from raising the level of Lake Thirlmere in the English Lake District (Ritvo 2009). In the United States John Muir commenced a similar campaign against the City of San Francisco's plans to build the Hetch Hetchy dam in Yosemite (Richter 2005). Neither campaign was successful but they set democratic precedents for civil action by groups of concerned citizens to defend the natural environment from industrial developments.<sup>6</sup> Rawnsley went on to found the English 'national trust' to conserve areas of the Lake District and other scenic landscapes from development, while John Muir's efforts in persuading the Federal government to extend the area of Yosemite protected by National Park status presaged a great expansion of the National Parks system and today Muir, a Presbyterian from Scotland, is known as the founding father of the US National Parks. Subsequent efforts in the twentieth century to protect particular places, and their resident species, from industrial and corporate development have led to the setting aside of around two per cent of the earth's land area as protected spaces – variously designated national parks, biospheres, nature reserves and marine reserves.

From the 1960s a range of environmental protests about chemical pollution, and air pollution, sparked by the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in the United States, and by the visible effects of acid rain on European forests, led to the development of formal environmental protection agencies and laws in many nations, but again these first developed in formerly majority Protestant countries including the United States, Sweden, Germany, and Britain. But in nations where democracy was, or still is, suppressed, environmental protests are weaker, and routinely resisted by State and private business interests. Hence in the former Soviet Union environmental damages were even more widespread than in Western industrial countries. To this day environmental protests and organisations are restricted, or even proscribed, by many nation states, including China, Turkey, Russia, Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador. Environmentalists risk being imprisoned, or even killed, in many of these countries.

## **6 Protestant Politics, Resistance to Tyranny, and the Rule of Law**

A fifth element from Protestant culture is also relevant, and this is the 'rule of law'. There is of course much debate about this but it is reasonable to argue that Martin Luther's doctrine of justification by faith fostered the emergence of a new conception of law: not so much as the

---

means to salvation, but as the means to restraining sin and evil in a world that continues fallen until the end times. Luther's emphasis on individual righteousness as emerging from the doctrine of justification by faith and underwrote Kant's refounding of the moral law in the reasoning mind of the individual as the primary source of ethics in the eighteenth century.

The Protestant theological emphasis on social justice, and freedom from tyranny, are also important sources of the idea of 'environmental justice' which is a phrase first coined into a Protestant Christian report into the connection between toxic waste dumps and associated health problems and communities of people of colour in the United States of America. While historians argue that this emphasis led to the 'wars of religion' in Europe in the seventeenth century, it was also arguably an important source of modern political conceptions of the rule of law, human rights, democratic governance, and freedom.

### *Environmentalism After Protestantism*

In his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis argues that, absent a transcendent ground for human and environmental justice, and law, in the nature of God, atheistic capitalistic and consumer cultures lack the moral and philosophical resources to defend social and environmental justice against the powerful individuals and forces which throughout human history have sought to subject the common good of all to private or elite interests (Francis 2015). In that case the excavation of the Protestant theological DNA of environmental *and* social justice and law, of the experiential knowledge of nature as sublimely beautiful, and as *spiritual* source of joy, is an urgent cultural project, when Europe and the West more broadly face increasing pressure from forms of atheistic anti-democratic capitalism, and especially neoliberal economics, which neglect the health of both people and planet and undermine democratic laws which protect them.

The environmental movements that originated in the 1960s were highly successful in producing law and regulations which successfully rolled back some of worst and most visible environmental problems such as river pollution, city air pollution, and chemical adulteration of food and drinking water. However since 1980s the rise of economic neoliberalism, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, has seen the emergence of growing economic and political resistance to environmental regulations, and corporations have sponsored extensive efforts to challenge the findings of environmental and climate scientists on the human and planetary health implications of industrial pollution of the air, atmosphere, food and water.<sup>7</sup> Another feature of corporate economic resistance to environmental regulation is the outsourcing of industrial and manufacturing activities to regions and nations with weaker environmental laws: iron, steel, aluminium, computers, electronics are

---

<sup>7</sup> On corporate sponsorship of efforts to deny climate science see Orestes (2011).

increasingly manufactured in domains such as China, India, Indonesia, Poland, Romania, and Turkey where coal remains the principal source of energy and where there is weak enforcement of environmental regulations. Perhaps the most extreme example of the rising influence of the neoliberal pushback against environmental regulation was the election of the Republican Presidential Candidate, Donald Trump, as President of the United States in 2016. Trump believes that climate change is a hoax, and withdrew the United States from the 2015 Paris Accord on Climate Change. Trump also appointed Scott Pruitt to head up the Environmental Protection Agency who had devoted much of his time as Attorney General of Oklahoma to resisting the EPA in State courts and since his appointment Pruitt has worked strenuously to reduce the EPA's effectiveness in making and enforcing environmental regulations (Schwartz, 2017).

Analogously those who led the ultimately successful Leave campaign in the UK referendum on the European Union in 2016 argued against European environmental and other regulations as illegitimate interference in the 'sovereignty' of the British parliament and people, and suggested that ending such regulations from Brussels would enable British people to 'take back control' over their lives. Many Brexit campaigners, including some who are now ministers in the UK government, are also openly critical of climate science, and of the need to restrain atmospheric emissions from the burning of fossil fuels. The UK government, just before the Brexit vote, banned further investment in on-shore wind, despite it having become the lowest cost per unit of domestically produced electricity in the UK, making the UK's commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions at the Paris CoP 2015, and its own parliament's Climate Change Acts, look less feasible.

If as I am arguing it was Protestantism's promotion of democracy, and its conception of creation as closer to God, and more beautiful, than the city, which was the fertile soil of the movements to protect the natural environment from industrial development and pollution, the demise of Protestantism as a cultural influence on policy-making in post-religious nations is a matter of grave concern. Absent a culture, and effective laws, which balance the democratic rights of ordinary citizens to a beautiful, clean, and safe environment and the vested interests of corporate power and the wealthy, there is a risk that political and legislative efforts to protect biodiversity and the atmosphere from ongoing damage will be weakened.

## References

Abrams, Meyer H. (1971) *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in the Romantics*. New York, W. W. Norton, 12, 122.

Berry, Evan (2015) *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism*, San Francisco, University of California Press.

Berry, R. J. (2003), *God's Book of Works: The Theology and Nature of Natural Theology: University of Glasgow Gifford Lectures*, London, Continuum.

Bratton, Susan Power (1993) *Christianity, Wilderness and Wildlife: The Original Desert Solitaire* University of Scranton Press.

Cobb, John B. and Griffin, David R. (1976), *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*, Louisville, KY, Westminster John Knox Press.

*Coleridge Among the Lakes and Mountains: From His Notebooks, Letters and Poems 1794 - 1804* (1991), Selected and edited by Roger Hudson, London, The Folio Society.

Dunlap, Riley E., George H. Gallup, and Alec M. Gallup (1993) *Health of the Planet: results of a 1992 international environmental opinion survey of citizens in 24 nations*, Princeton, NJ, George H. Gallup International Institute.

Dunlap, Thomas R. (2004) *Faith in Nature: Environmentalism as Religious Quest*, Seattle, WN, University of Washington Press.

Edwards, Jonathan (1842) 'The beauty of the world', in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, edited Tyron Edwards, Andover, Allen, Morrill and Wardwell.

Francis, Pope (2015), *Laudato 'Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, Vatican City, Vatican.

Gregory, Brad s (2012) *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularised Society*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press.

James, William (1902) *The Varieties of Religious Experience* New York, Longman Green and Co.

Lane, Belden (2004), 'Jonathan Edwards on Beauty, Desire, and the Sensory World', *Theological Studies* 65, 44-72.

Lane, Belden C, (2011), *Ravished by Beauty: The Surprising Legacy of Reformed Spirituality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Leopold, Aldo (1949) *Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Lowth, Robert (1829), *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. Calvin E. Stowe, Andover, Crocker and Brewster.

Milton, John (1667) *Paradise Lost*, London, Peter Parker, Robert Boulter & Mathias Walker.

Milton, John (1671) *Paradise Regained*, London, John Starkey.

Nash, James A. (1991), *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*, Nashville, Abingdon Press.

Nicolson, Marjorie Hope (1959), *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite*, Seattle, WN, University of Washington Press.

Northcott, Michael S (2013), *A Political Theology of Climate Change* Grand Rapids, MI, Wm. B Eerdmans.

Orestes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway, (2011) *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues From Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, London, Bloomsbury.

Prickett, Stephen (1996), *Origins of Narrative: The Romantic Appropriation of the Bible*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Richter, Robert W. (2005) *The Battle Over Hetch Hetchy: America's Most Controversial Dam and the Birth of Modern Environmentalism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Ritvo, Hariett (2009) *Dawn of Green: Manchester, Thirlmere and Modern Environmentalism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Schaeffer, Francis (1968a), *The God Who Is There*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Schaeffer, Francis (1968b), *Escape From Reason*, Leicester, Inter-Varsity Press.

Schaeffer, Francis (1970), *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Wheaton, IL, Tyndale House.

Schaeffer, Francis (1972) *Genesis in Space and Time*, Vancouver, Regal Books.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich (1928) *The Christian Faith* Eng. Trans. Second German Edition, Edinburgh, T. and T. Clark.

Schwartz, Joel (2017) 'Science, politics, and health: the Environmental Protection Agency at the threshold', *Epidemiology*, 28, 316-9.

Strachan, Gordon (2008) *Prophets of Nature: Green Spirituality in Romantic Poetry and Painting*, Edinburgh, Floris Books.

Stoll, Mark, (1997) *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*, Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

Taylor, Bron (2009), *Dark Green Religion: Nature, Spirituality and the Planetary Future*, San Francisco, University of California Press.

Taylor, Charles (1989), *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press.

Weber, Max (1930) Eng. trans. Talcott Parsons, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism and the Evolution of the Capitalist Spirit*. New York, Scribner.

Wiley, Tatha (2002) *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings*, New York, Paulist Press,

White Jr, Lynn (1967), 'The historic roots of our ecological crisis', *Science* 155,1203–1207.